

Jonathan Boucher to George Washington, November 19, 1771, Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers. Published by the Society of the Colonial Dames of America. Edited by Stanislaus Murray Hamilton.

FROM THE REVEREND JONATHAN BOUCHER.

ANNAPOLIS, Novr ye. 19th. 1771.

SIR

I have seen your Letter to your Son, & I will own to You, it has given Me a sensible Concern. That my Attention to Him has not lately been so close nor so rigid, as I wish'd, or, as it ought to have been, is a Truth I will not attempt to deny. The Peculiarity of my Circumstances & Situation, as well as of my Temper & Disposition, are All I have to offer in my Excuse, which, however, I do not myself think to be sufficient. I know I might have taught Him more than I have, &, sincerely as I wish his Welfare I wish I had; but I know also, that there are not many Masters under whom He would have learn'd more, than He has done under Me. This Business of Education is a complete & extensive Subject, & a man should be well acquainted with it, before He ventures to pronounce how far another has, or has not, done his Duty. Dr. Witherspoon, it seems, said I *ought* to have put Him into Greek. Now, how much Deference soever I owe to his Authority, I will venture to say, that this Declaration, at least, must have been made much at Random. It was not possible He should know what I *ought* to have done, from the few, & the Kind of, Questions He ask'd. To be acquainted with the Greek is thought to sound well, but, to determine upon a Youth's literary Attainments from that Circumstance alone, is not, in my Judgement, a much wiser method than the vulgar Way of enquiring *how far* a Boy has got; and if He has run thro' a long Catalogue of Books, to conclude He must be a good Scholar. Had

Library of Congress

Dr. Witherspoon been pleased candidly & fully to have examined this young Gentleman, I shou'd have had nothing to fear. He would not, indeed, have found Him possess'd of much of that dry, useless, & disgusting School-boy kind of Learning fit only for a Pedant; but I trust, He would have found Him not illy accomplished, considering his manners, Temper, & Years, in that liberal, manly, & necessary Knowledge befitting a Gentleman. I ever did hold in Abhorrence that servile System of teaching Boys Words rather than Things; & of getting a parcel of Lumber by Rote, which may be useful & necessary to a School-master, but can never be so to a Man of the World. In these, chiefly, Sir, your Son is deficient: & but that These are thought necessary to make a Shew of, it were not, I think, much to be lamented, should He ever remain so.—I neither have attended, nor dare I promise that I can attend, to Him with the Regularity of a School-master. But, Sir, tho' the little unessential Minutia of School-Learning may have sometimes been neglected, & thro' my Fault; I think I know You to be too observant & too candid a Man to believe that He has been wholly unattended to. His particular Genius & Complexion are not unknown to You; & that They are of a Kind requiring not the least Judgement & Delicacy to manage properly. Pardon Me, Sir, if I assume somewhat a higher Tone in claiming some Merit to myself, in having faithfully done my Duty in this the most arduous, &, doubtless, by far the most important Part of Education. I have hitherto, I thank God, conducted Him with tolerable Safety, thro' some pretty trying & perilous Scenes; &, remiss as I am, or seem to be, I doubt not, in due Time, to deliver Him up to You a *good* Man, if not a very *learned* one. It will not be thought necessary for Me to enter into a fuller Detail of this Matter: what I should say, I persuade myself, will occur to You.

Annapolis was as unfit a Situation for Me as Him, which I knew not, till Experience told Me. I am now, however, at length, again to return to the Country with a Prospect of fewer Embarrassments on my Hands, than it has been my good Fortune to be without for these five Years. I once was, I think, a good Preceptor: I have never been so, in my own opinion, for the Period just mentioned. If, however, You think proper to try Me a little longer, I think I can & will do better for Mr. Custis, than any other Man: if You do not think

Library of Congress

proper, convinc'd that You will be influenced only by your Regard for Him, most ardently wishing that You may most effectually consult his Interest, I shall never blame You for removing Him—if, indeed, my Blame or Approbation needed to be of Consequence to You. You will do Me the Justice to believe that I can have no other Motive for wishing his Continuance with Me, besides a kind of affectionate Attachment to the Boy, & a piece of Pride, perhaps, it may be, that another should not reap the Merit, if there be any Merit in it, of finishing what I have begun. I am now, I trust, happily set above the Necessity of teaching for a Livelihood; nor will I, as far as I can now Judge, ever take Charge of another Youth besides the Three now with Me. For the last Year, I have long ago mentioned it to my Friends, I never intended charging either Custis, or the other Two, any Thing for Education; & this only from what I thought a Consciousness that I had not deserved it. [mutilated] he continues with Me, & I do my Duty as I now intend (& if I do [mutilated] be the first to tell You of it) I will charge Him, at the least, four or five Times as much as I have ever yet done.

If, after all, You resolve on removing Him, all I have to add is a Request, that it may not be to Princeton. Pay Me the Complimt. of believing that I know something of these Matters: and there is not any Thing I am more convinced of, than that your own College is a better one—better in every Respect. You live contiguous to it, & hear every objecn. to it, often magnify'd beyond the Truth: & were this the Case wth. Respect to the Jerseys, I am mistaken, if You would hear less there. If, however, the Objections to Williamsburg be insuperable, I wou'd then recommend New-York: it is but a Step farther, & for obvious Reasons, infinitely deserves the Preference.¹

I am, Sir, yr. most obedt. & very Hble Servt.

JONAN. BOUCHER

¹ It is not difficult to imagine why so ardent a Loyalist as Dr. Boucher objected to the staunch patriotism of Princeton.